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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

28 April 1961

DRAFT

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Probable Reactions to the Positioning of US Combat Forces in South Vietnam and Thailand

1. Bloc leaders would probably be initially uncertain as to the ultimate US intent in positioning its combat forces in Thailand and South Vietnam, but if these forces did not very soon thereafter intervene in Laos, they would probably consider that the US was prepared to accept the loss of much or all of Laos, and that the mission of the US forces was limited to denying the Communists further gains in the Thailand-Indochina area. In any event, they would probably anticipate that these US actions would not necessitate a halt to the further Communist absorption of much of Laos, and would probably remain confident that Viet Cong subversion of South Vietnam could continue even in the presence of US troops there. Moreover, they would probably expect, we believe correctly, that there would be a generally adverse world reaction to these US moves, especially with respect

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to South Vietnam, and that the Bloc could derive considerable advantages from exploiting these reactions through largely political and propaganda means. We do not believe that the Bloc would respond to the US actions by major military action, at least initially.

2. We continue to believe that the Bloc effort in Laos has not been motivated as much by regard for the outcome in Laos itself, as by confidence that events in Laos would ultimately result in a sharp prestige defeat of the US, world-wide, and a reduction of Free World confidence in its leadership. Bloc leaders would probably consider that the US could be humiliated if it did not quickly intervene in Laos and in the final analysis acquiesced in the collapse of Laos by PL pressures and Bloc diplomatic flim-flam. Communist leaders would probably consider that a general continuance of present PL tactics in Laos would carry relatively little risk of greatly expanded hostilities, and would almost certainly order such pressures to continue, confident that the FAL-RLG, without major US intervention in Laos, would soon collapse. Bloc leaders would probably also be confident that, if the US ultimately did intervene in Laos, there would be not much left to save except

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a few towns along the Mekong, and that the Bloc could fall back on a cease-fire and an international conference -- with most of Laos in hand, and with the US at odds with much of the world.

3. Communist concern and response would be much sharper concerning the US forces in South Vietnam than in the case of Thailand. There would be heavy political and propaganda play in both cases. Concerning South Vietnam, the Bloc would charge that the US had contravened the 1954 Geneva Accords by introducing its forces, and would seek UN and international condemnation of this "lawlessness." Communist China and the DRV would be especially concerned about the presence of US combat forces in neighboring South Vietnam, and would almost certainly make a strong response. We believe, however, that this response would be limited, at least initially, to dire threats, political action, and heightened support of Viet Cong terrorist activities. Bloc leaders would probably consider that the subversion of South Vietnam had been made more difficult by the US action, and that DRV stiffening of the Viet Cong must not become so extreme as to risk US military retaliation against Hanoi. Nevertheless, Moscow, Peiping, and Hanoi would probably not be convinced that the US action threatened the Viet Cong, and would probably direct it to continue and if possible accelerate its activities, testing

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whether US forces would prove more formidable enemies than were the French.

4. Non-Communist reactions to the positioning of US troops in Thailand and South Vietnam would vary greatly. The neutralist nations of the Afro-Asian group would be highly critical of the move, even though the leaders of some of them might see some advantage to their nation's security in such a specific US commitment to hold the line against further Communist advances in Southeast Asia. The SEATO countries would probably welcome the move, and some of them might be willing to contribute token forces to a standing SEATO garrison. There would be many world leaders, however, who would criticize the positioning of US troops in Thailand and South Vietnam as provocative and as a gesture of little significance in helping those two countries to meet the primary Communist threats of subversion and infiltration.

5. Prime Minister Sarit would probably welcome US troops as evidence of serious US intentions to defend Thailand against Communist aggression. However, there would probably be strong adverse reactions from some elements of the Thai public and government. US troops stationed in Thailand would make more

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difficult any future adjustments in Thai policy toward the Bloc, a situation many Thai leaders would feel inopportune in the aftermath of a Communist take-over in Laos.

6. Vietnamese leaders would probably be relieved, on the one hand, that forceful US assistance was at hand, but concerned on the other that this action might complicate the GVN's efforts to gain greater political support of the country-side over the long run, and, in time, <sup>might</sup> lead either to further Communist gains or to a virtual US protectorate. The GRC would consider the US actions to be too little and too late, would be concerned for future US "retreats" at its expense, and would increase its calls on the US to escape calamity by sharply increased support of the GRC and its policies.

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